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Reauthorize the Older Americans Act

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey: Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of the House Amendment to S. 192, the Older Americans Act Reauthorization Act of 2015. It has been nearly ten years since Congress last reauthorized the Older Americans Act (OAA), making today's amendment and the reforms in the underlying bill long overdue.

Last year marked the 50th Anniversary of the OAA and its many social services and programs that continue to provide a critical safety net for seniors around the country. This includes supportive services, nutrition services—whether at group sites or home-delivered programs such as “meals on wheels”—family caregiver support, community service employment, and services to protect seniors from and prevent abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

In New Jersey, the Department of Human Services Division of Aging Services uses OAA funds to serve more than 500,000 individuals. From 2000 to 2010, New Jersey saw a 15 percent increase in individuals age 60 and older, representing 19 percent of the state population. By 2030, it is projected that those 60 and older will represent over 25 percent of the state population, making OAA services and programs more critical than ever.

Among many reforms, S. 192 contains provisions to reduce elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation in long term facilities,

improve federal collaboration with state and local agencies and service providers on the modernization of senior centers, and improve care coordination for those with multiple chronic conditions with services through health care entities such as Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs).

It reforms funding allocations to ensure that money follows the person, helping maximize the number of seniors reached by the OAA's services and programs. It permits state grant programs to begin providing support services for chronic condition self-care management and falls prevention. It also requires states to utilize a dietician in its nutrition projects and encourage the use of locally grown foods—as well as partnerships and contracts with local producers and providers—in meal programs.

The ad-hoc means of funding these programs over the last several years has made them less secure and efficient. As our population ages, it is imperative that we preserve access to these and other services that enable senior citizens to live healthy and productive lives, and give seniors the security and confidence they need when planning for their future medical care and financial security. Today's vote will protect and improve OAA's vital programs to assist and protect older Americans, allowing them to maintain their independence and quality of life during retirement.